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ABSTRACT

This research article and literature review is intended to arouse teachers' interest in the possibility of using drama as a supplementary instructional tool for enhancing their teaching as well as their students' learning. It maintains that educational drama can make students more engaged in their learning, render learning more purposeful for students, and foster cooperative attitudes among students. The article discusses: (1) how drama can be a powerful medium for enhancing students' language development especially in the areas of oral communication, reading, and writing; (2) how it affects cognitive abilities; and (3) how it enhances affective growth through promoting self-confidence, social skills, and increased empathy. The article concludes by briefly discussing ways in which educational drama also benefits teachers. A list of 23 references is attached. (SR)

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INTRODUCTION

While educational technologies, such as television, computers or videodiscs, have been increasingly adopted in classrooms as instructional tools, there is a non-technological, yet pedagogically sound, teaching and learning method which has received relatively little attention in schools. This is *drama*, or to be more specific, *educational drama*. As will be discussed in this paper, educational drama can have the positive effects of making students more engaged in their learning, rendering learning more purposeful for students, and fostering co-operative attitudes among students. Furthermore, if employed effectively, it can be a powerful medium for enhancing students' (i) language development, (ii) cognitive abilities, and (iii) affective growth - all of which are essential for well-rounded education. Based on existing literature and research, this article will focus on the potential of drama in these three developmental areas. But let us first define what drama is in this context.

The Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guideline, Dramatic Arts (1981), discusses drama both as subject and as method. Although both are interrelated, each has its own emphasis. As subject, drama is regarded as an independent discipline in which "the dramatic play is shaped, moulded, and even scripted with a view towards performance for spectators" (p.6). The keywords here are refinement of acting techniques, use of polished scripts, rehearsals, stage productions, and public performance. The emphasis is thus perfection of the final product for an audience.

As method, on the other hand, drama is considered as a means or a learning strategy for helping students explore and understand different subject areas or achieve certain educational goals. Terms such as "educational drama", "improvisational drama", and "creative drama" have been used interchangeably in the literature. Although each may have its unique meaning, they all stress role-playing through *improvisation* - i.e. spontaneous self-expression. Instead of enacting a prepared script, in this type of drama students are usually given a story line, a topic, a scenario and/or some parameters, and they improvise certain roles or situations by responding to the circumstances which arise and the actions and reactions of other players. It is this type of drama, which underscores improvisation, creativity and dynamics, that will be discussed in this article.

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LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Oral Communication

An area where drama has its most obvious and proven benefits is oral language development - in terms of articulation and diction. As Miller and Mason (1983) write, "dramatics is thinking out loud." This is particularly so for improvised drama where dialogue is not only central, but is also highly dynamic, creative and reflective in nature. Because of the need to improvise, one has to define, articulate, express and verbalize images, objects, situations and thoughts as one explores and reflects on the arising issues, concepts, relationships or events in context. As Ms. Lundy (1992), Drama Co-ordinator for the Toronto Board of Education, comments, "the reason the language skills of children are enhanced through drama is because the children are working very hard to select the language that most closely fits the requirements of the dramatic situation." Also as Booth (1987) puts it, "[In drama,] children are not talking to talk but talking to learn, to influence, to persuade, to interpret; they are using and developing all of their linguistic resources." Such drama activities thus afford students opportunities to elicit, develop and use their verbal skills appropriately in different social situations (O'Neill, 1989). For instance, Wagner (1985) observed that, in the course of five one-hour sessions, Ms. Heathcote, a widely known teacher in educational drama, was able to move her students from using casual, everyday language to more precise and formal diction suited for certain occasions.

There are numerous studies which examine the effects of drama on oral language development for elementary school students. Vitz (1983), Miller and Mason (1983) and Wagner (1985) reviewed a large number of related studies, and found that a high percentage of the studies reviewed have reported significant results on verbal language development for regular classroom students (kindergarten to grade 7) as well as second language students and language disordered children. A synthesis of some of these research findings indicates that with improvised drama, regardless of their age or ability, students made significant gains in their verbal communication skills, especially with regard to flexibility, originality, coherence, fluency, complexity, number of words, and total verbal output.

Reading

Aside from oral language growth, drama can also promote reading among students (Harp, 1988; O'Neill, 1989; Christie, 1990). When students know that they are going to dramatize a story, they have a sense of purpose for reading and tend to read more intensively than they normally do. Unlike answering comprehension questions which draws one's attention to only parts of what was read, when students prepare for dramatization, they need to understand the entire story and its details - for example the story sequences, plots, characters and meanings. Such intensive reading enables students to gain better comprehension of and appreciation for the literature or the stories read.

The comprehension and appreciation level attained in their preparatory reading will be further heightened during dramatization, when students have to actively interpret and reconstruct the story (Yaffe, 1989). As Ms. Lundy (1992) writes, "Drama requires children to go beyond the text that they are reading. If they wonder why the people in the story acted the way that they did, they can act out situations related

to the story so that they understand the story better in terms of their own personal lives." She also remarks that "... drama [is used] to extend the story, elaborate on the details of it and to pursue the part of the story that the children did not understand, or the part that made them want to know more.... What we are hoping to do when we teach drama in the language program is to help students fully comprehend what they read or hear so that they can then modify and revalue their own ideas and expand their repertoires of feeling, tolerance, and understanding."

Again the research reviews of Vitz (1983) and Miller & Mason (1983) offer some evidence on the effectiveness of educational drama on reading achievement. For instance, some of the studies reviewed in their articles used comparison methods to evaluate the efficacy of drama on reading comprehension, and found that children using story dramatization manifested significant improvement in reading over some of the traditional reading comprehension methods such as basal reader workbooks, discussion or drawing. Educational drama has also been shown to produce positive impact on the reading achievement of secondary school students (Knudson, 1970; Pate, 1977), as well as socially disadvantaged students (Black and Hispanic students in two economically disadvantaged regions - Gourgey, Bosseau & Delgado, 1984).

Writing

According to some theorists and researchers, drama can also serve as an effective pre-writing strategy for enhancing students' creative writing. It has been suggested that students tend to write better both in terms of quantity and quality as a result of their involvement in improvisational drama. First of all, drama provides a rich context for writing. As Booth and Lundy (1990) put it, "This is a teaching tool that all but inevitably makes students want to write, research and learn more about whatever area they have been drawn into by their improvisations" (p.26). Secondly, the dramatization experience helps students clarify images, as they are able to identify visually and kinesthetically each movement and gesture during their enactment. The "opportunity to use gesture in drama may help them kinesthetically to identify with a particular posture and stance, and to produce the natural language that goes with it" (Wagner, n.d., p.8). Moreover, role-playing permits students to experience different situations and discover new perspectives. All this can bring about increased awareness of senses and feelings, and better focus in conceptual ideas (Wagner, 1985). As a consequence, the stories or essays produced are likely to be richer in context containing more gesture, graphical or sensory details, clearer concepts and deeper insights.

Although empirical research on educational drama and creative writing is scarce, there are a few studies which lend support to the effectiveness of drama as a pre-writing technique for both elementary and secondary school students. For instance, Roubicek's study (1983) shows that the grade 5 students who were exposed to story dramatization prior to writing composed better essays in terms of ideas, flavour and elaboration than the control group exposed to structured discussion. Ridel's study (1975), cited in Wagner's review, reported that grade 9 students tended to write more original creative stories after a creative drama program. Wagner (1987) conducted a study with grade 4 and 8 students, and found that role playing was more effective in enhancing subsequent writing, in this case persuasive letter writing, than a direct instruction method which involved a presentation of models and rules for persuasive writing.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The abovementioned effects on language acquisition are closely related to the development of cognitive abilities. For instance, better articulation in oral communication, increased reading comprehension, and more in-depth writing are important cognitive skills. In addition, improvisational drama lends itself to fostering higher order thinking skills - such as creative thinking, mental imaging, and perspective taking. The link between these skills and improvised drama is that during improvisation, one is constantly required to explore one's mind, and to make use of one's reflective and imaginative power. Also during role-playing, one has to put oneself in someone else's shoes, to see things from different perspectives, to create opposing opinions, and to anticipate others' responses and reactions (O'Neill, 1989). And in order to make the characters and situations improvised come alive, students need to draw on their past experiences and apply their own background knowledge into their interpretation and improvisation (Harp, 1988). In short, through improvised drama, students learn "to anticipate reactions, feelings, and behaviour; to reflect on issues; to establish perspective; and to rehearse appropriate strategies for responding to experiences" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1981, p.6). Again as stated in the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guideline:

> A student involved in a drama activity will be called upon to practise several thinking skills, such as: inventing, generating, speculating, assimilating, clarifying, inducing, deducing, analyzing, accommodating, selecting, refining, sequencing, and judging. (p.7)

These exploratory and creative thinking skills have their cross-curricular applications, especially in social science subjects such as history and geography (Booth & Lundy, 1990). By playing the roles or improvising the lives of people of the past or in other situations, students are no longer simply studying the facts as a subject, nor are they passively receiving the information from their textbooks or teachers. Rather, students are encouraged to perceive and empathize with the lives, experiences, and perspectives of other people. These activities help students develop insights into subject matters, grasp underlying concepts, and understand issues from different viewpoints. Moreover, through drama, a topic that seems remote to students' immediate interests or needs may become more relevant or meaningful as they get actively engaged in the role play, where they have to draw on their own experiences and knowledge and use their own interpretation in the improvisational process.

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of empirical research to show the positive relationship between educational drama and students' thinking and learning skills. A study by Clift (1985) does, however, shed some light. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to measure the effects of drama on a group of (102) secondary school students. Although it was reported that both the traditional lecture/seatwork instructional method and dramatic enactment produced similar results in terms of students' attentiveness and their concept acquisition and retention, the study also reveals that dramatic enactment was able to elicit from the students more instances of higher-order thinking, and fewer instances of lesson-irrelevant thought than in the lecture/seatwork situation. According to the students in the study, the enactment experience helped them visualize concepts and develop insight into the feelings and emotions of historical or literary characters. Yet, more studies, both quantitative and qualitative research, are needed to replicate such studies as

Clift's in order to demonstrate the full effects of drama on students' cognitive development.

AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

Equally important is the promotion of students' affective growth, and again drama seems to be effective in enhancing students' attitudes with regard to self-confidence, social behaviours, and empathy.

Self-confidence

More than mere formal classroom lessons, improvised dramas have the advantage of being enjoyable and free from the fear of failure or criticism because different and even conflicting interpretations and ideas are acceptable (Christie, 1990; Miller & Mason, 1983). Such a pleasant and non-threatening environment is conducive to learning and encourages risk-taking and experimentation, since the learning atmosphere poses no risk to student self-esteem. This is particularly beneficial to slow, bored, troubled, difficult, shy or unassertive students. Not only can they enjoy the drama process, but their very participation in these nonjudgmental activities makes them feel involved, which is important for boosting their self-concept and confidence (Miller & Mason, 1983; Booth & Lundy, 1990).

In fact, Clift's study (1985) has noted that not only did dramatic enactment elicit more expressions of interest and enthusiasm among the students during instruction than the traditional lecture/seatwork method, it also elicited fewer expressions of fear - "fear of being singled out by the teacher and having the class's attention drawn to one's ignorance of an answer" (p.42). Eadie (1985) conducted a study with a group of grade 12 drama students in a Toronto school. In one of her interviews, a student said:

> When I started drama three years ago, I was very shy and didn't say much in a group. I didn't think anybody would listen or care. In drama, you realize nobody will criticize. I can now talk in a group even if others disagree with me and I've learned how to listen to others. (p.120)

Similarly, an observational study done in a North York high school (Crawford, Galloway, & Peebles, 1989) shows that the grade 7 and 9 students who had participated in a drama program "became more assertive, less self conscious, and more willing to take risks" (p.3). Beales and Zemel's recent study (1990) of a group of high school students also found that although students in the dramatic group did not score significantly higher than the control group on the self-esteem scale, they did have a significantly higher rating on other related scales such as "social presence" and "achievement via independence" - both of which are indicators of one's self-confidence.

Social Skills

Drama can also strengthen students' social and interpersonal skills. Drama is a social activity, in which participants are encouraged to work in a group setting and to interact with each other on both real and symbolic levels" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1981, p.7). Collaboratiave skills - such as group discussion, negotiation, and reconciliation - are reinforced as a result of these activities.

Vitz's review (1983) cites an earlier study by Vogel (1975) who investigated the use of drama with learning disabled children as a means of helping them acquire appropriate social behaviours. Significant improvements for the drama group were reported in social adjustment as measured by the California Test of Personality (Vitz, 1983). Grunbaum's study (1986, cited in Beales & Zemel, 1990) on 14-year-old students analyzed teachers' and students' responses to drama classes and to a questionnaire, and reported that through educational drama students' social maturity - in terms of attitudes toward others and interpersonal interactions - was enhanced.

The anecdotal findings of Eadie in Toronto (1985) and Crawford et al. in North York (1989) further illustrate the effectiveness of educational drama on reinforcing co-operative learning attitude among students.

> In drama everything is very open. You know everybody. You work with everybody.... In a typical classroom everybody sits in rows of desks and you only interact with people around you. You never talk to somebody on the other side of the room. You just get to know them from how they interact with the teacher. In drama I participate a lot. Well, you have to. In some of my other courses I hardly say anything. (Eadie, 1985, p.60)

> ... groups who worked together became more caring and trusting. A greater sense of group responsibility developed.... Social interaction was better as groups became more cohesive and willing to work together to resolve problems that arose, ... Students also matured in a number of developmental skills as they became more focused on listening to each other, with a concomitant improvement in concentration. (Crawford et al., 1989, p.3)

Increased Empathy

Closely related to social and interpersonal skills is one's empathy for others, and drama seems to be an effective vehicle for promoting such ability among students. In drama, not only can one learn how to communicate with each other during the improvisational process, one can also discover how to understand, and become aware of others. Moreover, role playing and acting out of imaginary situations allow students to "explore emotions, attitudes, opinions, and relationships and accommodate these abstract concepts more readily by representing them in a dramatic, and therefore more concrete, form" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1981, p.7). Drama is thus a concrete way of learning "abstract, social, moral, and ethical concepts", and a valuable means to the understanding of personal and human experiences (Robbins, 1988).

The study by Grougey et al. (1984) supported the above claims that as a result of their improvisational dramatics program, the disadvantaged elementary students made significant improvement not only in self-awareness but also in awareness and acceptance of others. Beales and Zemel's recent study (1990) also reveals that students in the drama group rated significantly higher than the control group on those measures related to social tolerance. In fact, because of its potential to arouse students' awareness of and empathy for others, drama has been employed by a number of Toronto's elementary and secondary schools as a vehicle to promote anti-racist education for their students.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

In addition to the great potential of drama in fostering *students'* linguistic, intellectual, attitudinal and emotional growth, educational drama is also beneficial to *teachers*. As indicated in Hladki's report on an in-service drama program in Toronto (1991), educational drama gives teachers a new light for understanding and eliciting the hidden talents of some of their students, especially new immigrant students whose talents may not have surfaced in regular classroom activities. As well, educational drama can be a tool for helping teachers themselves enhance their practice, because through educational drama, teachers can learn to play different roles in their classrooms. For instance, when drama is used, teachers have to switch from their conventional role as an instructor or the source of knowledge to the role of facilitator or collaborator. The latter is important for guiding and encouraging students "to take the major responsibility for giving meaning to the curricular concepts and to communicate them through action, gesture, and dialogue" (Robbins, 1988, p.2).

In order to tap the full potential of educational drama, teachers need training in how to integrate drama into their teaching. As Vitz (1983) points out in her review, the insignificant research results reported in many studies may partly be attributed to the teachers' lack of experience and training in educational drama. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss *how* drama can be employed effectively in classrooms. But it is hoped that this article will arouse teachers' interest in the possibility of using drama as a supplementary instructional tool for enhancing their teaching as well as their students' learning.

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